

NOTES ON THE WAY

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THE ATLANTIC COLLEGES *by Kurt Hahn*

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This week's NOTES ON THE WAY consists of an address made by Dr. Kurt Hahn at the Plenary Session of the Atlantic Community Conference at Bruges.

As the official summary of M. Spaak's closing speech put it 'The Atlantic Community exists. It offers the best hope for mankind in the crucial struggle against totalitarianism for the preservation of individual and collective liberties and international peace. This hope cannot be realized unless the people of the Atlantic world, sensing the urgency of the Soviet challenge, join not only their military but also their political, economic and social resources in a common cause.'

The great strength of the Atlantic idea, and a source of confidence in assessing the future, is the universal appeal of the basic moral values and way of life which Atlantic peoples share. Our civilization is open to all nations wishing to belong, without regard to race or creed. The limits of the Atlantic Community are fixed by the attitudes of mind, not by geographic boundaries.'

I would like to discuss a project: the plan for the Atlantic Colleges. It is a plan that was born in Paris in 1955 and was inspired by the experience of Air Marshal Sir Lawrence Darvall, the Commandant of the NATO Defence College. For two years Sir Lawrence had seen staff officers and diplomats who had arrived with considerable prejudices, from different nations, learning through the daily devotion to a common task, how to give to the foreigners' point of view, a hearing first of all, then understanding, and finally even sympathy, till one day a community had found itself. After six months many of these men left with an almost missionary zeal.

This prompted Sir Lawrence to say, not only to me but also to other educators:

'If we can plant the germ of new loyalties in mature men, how much deeper are the roots we could sink in the youth of the Atlantic Community, if at their most impressionable period we could gather them together in residential colleges, making them members of a self-governing community which demands much of them.'

In this way the plan of founding the Atlantic Colleges was conceived.

Before I describe it in detail I want to give an account of our reading of human nature in the young people on both sides of the Iron Curtain; for it is this reading which has given us the courage to advocate such an ambitious scheme. I submit that the state of the young people throughout the Atlantic community ought to cause great anxiety and at the same time stir great hope at this juncture. I also submit that it calls for the urgent attention both of statesmen and educators.

THE YOUNG people of the free world appear to be becoming indifferent not only to our common cause but also to all common causes. They show a growing unreadiness for dedication of any kind. The 'Obne mich' movement in Germany is flourishing; the 'I

couldn't care less' movement in Britain is gaining strength. Too many in the free world emerge from adolescence either lawless or listless. The listless lack that biological vitality which distinguishes their contemporaries in Russia and the satellite States. The lawless seem to have no humanity.

How has this come about? Our young people are surrounded by certain social diseases against which the established systems of education have not yet developed an antidote. There is deterioration in fitness caused by modern methods of locomotion; there is a decline in initiative, because of the widespread disease of 'spectatoritis'; there is above all a decay of compassion because of the unseemly speed at which modern life is conducted and, as William Temple said of callousness, 'There lies the way to spiritual death'.

The temper of the young conditions the temper of a nation, not only tomorrow but today. Dictators know that better than the responsible statesmen in the free world: after Stalingrad, Hitler pleaded with the young almost in a whining voice to give him their faith, calling them the source of his strength and renewal.

NOW WHAT are the grounds of hope? In the first place it is possible to introduce into the plan of life of our young people health-giving activities that will give them physical fitness and at the same time restore their souls. Secondly, a great challenge has been thrown out to the young of the West, which has stirred them deeply. I am referring to the Hungarian revolt; it has been drowned in blood, but it has been spiritually victorious. In October 1956 one of the most wonderful sounds was heard — the 'sound of fetters breaking' — we shall hear it again: 'La bataille est partie' as Foch used to say. I am not referring to the military battle. While we should never tire of emphasizing in public the defensive character of our military alliance — in the psychological war we should be the attackers, and our young have it in them to become the vanguard of our spiritual offensive. Since October 1956, the masters of the enslaved world know that they have lost the fight for the soul of youth. But the West has not yet won it.

There lurks in waiting a third force, a disintegrating force, cynicism, which since the outcome of the war has afflicted the youth of the victorious Western nations. Russia fears the verdict of youth as the judgment day and Christianity is the weed in the well-ordered garden of the devil. He tries in vain to exterminate it. Will it spread, irresistibly? That is the fateful issue for the human race.

Today a cheated youth in the satellite countries and in Russia looks towards the West full of hope and full of distrust, asking a question that makes us blush.

'Are you in earnest about the ideals you profess?'

Who shall give an answer?

I say: 'Free young men and women prepared to render hard and willing service, ready to do as the

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Good Samaritan has done.' We believe that it is possible in a short time to inspire a small section of Atlantic Youth to set an example which will carry conviction. We go further. We hope that we will be able to introduce among the masses of young people throughout the free world activities which will give them new spiritual vigour and prepare them to follow the lead given by the minority.

I WILL NOW describe the plan of the Atlantic Colleges in detail.

We propose that Atlantic Colleges should be founded in six different nations (Canada, France, Great Britain, Greece, Germany and America). Carefully selected boys between the ages of sixteen and nineteen would be sent to these colleges without regard to the financial position of their parents or their social origins. The boys would come from the fifteen NATO Nations, from uncommitted countries, it is hoped from the satellite States and one day even from Russia.

They would be prepared for a University Entrance Examination to be recognized throughout the free world. Each national group would be accompanied by a teacher of their own language and history. There would be 'national' houses where nationals coming from all represented countries should live and each house would be called after one nation and would be suitably equipped with furniture, pictures and a library, all meant to remind boys from Norway, or France, or Germany, of their respective roots, from which they should not be estranged.

The boys would receive a training designed to build up that vital health about which the totalitarian Governments feel a deep concern and which is treated with such indifference within the established educational systems of the Western world. Their curriculum would, therefore, include training in initiative and resourcefulness, in endurance and foresight through expeditions in the mountains or in sailing ships on the deep sea. We want to develop these qualities in our boys and harness them to the service of their fellow men. This, we believe, can best be done by giving them a careful training in various rescue and life-saving techniques and then offering them the chance of undertaking active service as Coastguards, or members of the Fire Service, or of Mountain Rescue teams. Adventurous and exacting service for the saving of lives — that is more than the moral equivalent to war, which William James challenged educators and statesmen to discover.

THE EQUIVALENT has been discovered by brotherhoods in every country. I am thinking of the National Ski Patrol in the United States, of the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia which since 1910 has saved more than ninety thousand lives, of the Bavarian Mountain Watch and of the St. John Ambulance Brigade. Every one of these volunteer bodies can testify that active rescue service shows human nature at its highest dynamic. But the service must be real, that is to say adolescents should feel that they will be used as men in danger and in need. Boys who drill and labour, encounter boredom, hardship, danger — all to be ready to serve their brother in peril — flare up in anger when they meet the totalitarian creed with its contempt for human life and dignity. They will have discovered God's purpose in their inner life.

A faith which is to be held sacred cannot be learnt, it must be experienced. The faith of the Good Samaritan is the only reliable basis of our common cause. The Atlantic Community will not inspire loyalty among the young unless they feel it is dedicated to the service of humanity. I am reminded of Burke's words:

'To be attached to the sub-division, to love the little platoon, is the first principle, the germ as it were of public affec-

tions—the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love of our country and mankind.'

Our Atlantic young people will become attached to the small community in which they have worked, adventured and served together. They will have learnt to love one other country besides their own, and that is a link in their advance to Atlantic citizenship.

I am confident that the young trained in the Atlantic Colleges would return to their own countries — to use words of Churchill — 'as missionaries more keen, as champions more resolute than those at the disposal of the totalitarian States'.

What response can we expect in their homelands? Not only diseases are catching; there is also such a thing as an infectious health. But the lead given by the Atlantic boys will not be followed unless the joy and the purpose of their training has already been experienced by the boys working and learning there.

Is it possible for these activities in which we believe to play an important part in the lives of boys in schools and industry? That is the vital issue. We feel encouraged by the record of the Outward Bound schools, the first of four in Britain was launched in 1941, one is operating in Malaya today, two in Africa, two in Germany. Seven hundred firms in Great Britain are sending their apprentices for one month to Outward Bound courses to build up their physique, to taste adventure, and to prepare themselves for arduous and helpful service; industry has testified that the boys often return with a more responsible and humane outlook. In Germany the two Outward Bound schools are also supported by industry, in addition ten secondary schools send whole classes in the middle of the term. They have found that the gain in vitality by far outweighs the loss in lesson hours.

In Africa and in Malaya, Outward Bound is trying, and trying hopefully, to contribute to racial concord. Rescue training has a place of honour in all Outward Bound schools. We are fully aware that the beneficial effects may be only transitory. Outward Bound can begin the cure: to continue it we need a challenge to confront boys and girls in daily life.

We plan on the Continent to institute a badge, presenting certain tests likely to appeal to any normal youth. We hope that the badge shall be known as the Fridjof Nansen Badge, in honour of the great patriot, explorer and scholar, who towards the end of his life sacrificed all his most cherished interests to rescue millions of suffering people of nations other than his own. The badge scheme will be similar to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and will present goals in athletic fitness, in expedition-craft, in resolute pursuits of skill and study and above all in rescue training. It will also include a solitary journey of investigation undertaken in a foreign country, an idea modelled on the projects which the late Monsieur Jean Walter of the Zellidja Foundation suggested to a certain number of specially chosen young Frenchmen; since 1938 he has inspired more than three thousand young people to undertake expeditions which demanded remarkable initiative, tenacity and imagination.

I THINK I can sum up all I have said like this: the young people of today are not in a healthy state of mind or body, but there is hope yet of a rapid recovery. Underneath their veneer of scepticism and cynicism the youth of the free world have a great longing for a common cause to 'cry out'. We believe that a cause exists which can claim them body and soul. That is the cause which the Atlantic Community serves. I conclude with George Trevelyan's words:

'Two passions are not likely to die out of the world, love of country and love of liberty. They can be kept pure by the one thing which can tame yet not weaken them, tender humanity for all men.'

ER - please file under

"Kurt Hahn"